



Match Report



London Division 1 (South)

Maidstone FC 41 v Havant RFC 22

Played at The Mote, Saturday 28 November, 2015



In a game of fluctuating fortunes, Maidstone came out on top with a six-try victory, 41-22, against Havant, lying just one place below them in the table. But in honesty, the scoreline was flattering to the home side as, with ten minutes left on the clock, the visitors scored two quick tries to challenge Maidstone's lead and caused a few fluttering hearts among the spectators.

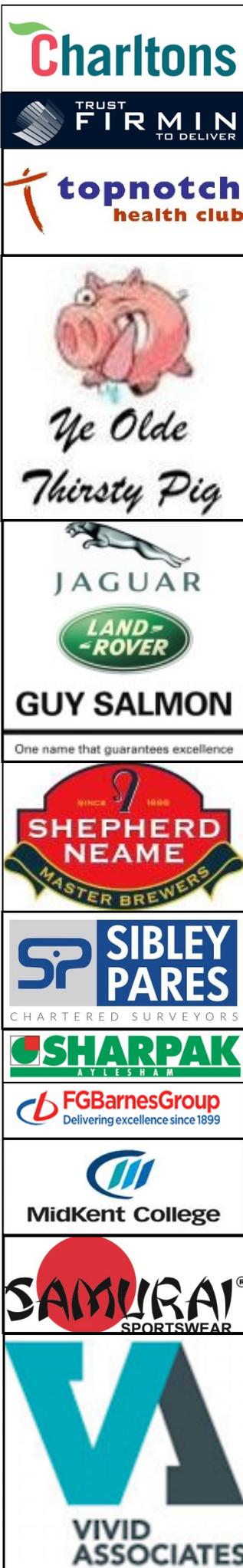
Havant's last visit to The Mote was in the 1992-93 season, when both sides were in the national leagues, and on that occasion, the south-coast side were comfortable victors. But in the more humble playing position both clubs now find themselves in, they both contrived to set up an afternoon of scintillating rugby. Whether this was to the liking of both sets of coaches is a separate discussion, but for the neutral spectator there was plenty of 'dash' from both sides to maintain their interest throughout.

Both DJ Kannemeyer and Jake Eaglesham picked up injuries at Brighton, so some reshuffling of the team was required. Harry Millar returned to fly-half with Rory Beech reverting to full back and, with Alfie Paea available again, at centre, the back line looked like an optimum set up. The scrum also needed some rejigging, with Ben Massey coming back from injury, at second row, Hugh Cowan taking over at open side and Charlie Williams claiming the No 8 role.



Maidstone started the game at a canter and delivered two tries in the first ten minutes. Jake Johnson got the first after Maidstone turned over Havant at the line out, with Harry Millar adding the extras, while Josh Pankhurst claimed the second





following a maul on the visitors five metre line, to establish a 12-0 lead.

But once Havant had got the coach journey out of their legs, they began to play to their strengths, controlling the ball through multiple phases of attack. Their big pack set up the field position with deft handling to keep

the ball live and when the three-quarter line came into action, they played the ball wide to stretch the home defence.

With the end of the first quarter approaching, a thrust in the left corner by Havant's liveliest player, hooker Trail, delivered their first points to reduce Maidstone's lead to 12-5. This was not the end of their revival: a break through the centre fully stretched the Maidstone defence but it was a penalty for a late tackle that led to the next score on the half hour.



While Maidstone managed to halt the subsequent catch and drive, continuous pressure by the visitors was rewarded by a try in the left corner by winger, Blackburn, to reduce Maidstone's lead to two points. But as Havant had had their twenty minutes of advantage, it was now the turn of the home side to turn the screw.

With half-time approaching, Maidstone conjured the best move of the match. From a scrum on half way, Craig Webb made a break in the centre and passed inside to Paea. His quick pass back to Webb, on the loop, flat footed the defence and a slick grubber kick to the corner was picked up by Waring in full flight to score in the right corner, generating a 17-10 lead.



This was consolidated at the start of the second half. A penalty in the Havant 22 was tapped by Ben Williams and his gal-

loping run over the visitor's defence yielded a try by the posts, allowing Millar an easy conversion and a 24-10 cushion.

Maidstone gave themselves an even greater margin of security at the end of the third quarter. This time it was Webb who scored after good build up play following a Havant kick from defence. Morosan fielded the kick in mid-field, bringing Beech into the move on half way, who, in turn, set up Waring on



the wing, again. But this time, his overhead pass, inside, gave Webb the space to beat the defence and score half way out. With Millar adding the conversion, Maidstone's lead expanded to 31-10.



This should have signalled a period of control by Maidstone to see out the game. Instead, collective concentration wavered and Havant scored a brace of tries inside a few minutes just before the half hour to reduce the lead to 31-22.

A calming penalty by Millar, restored Maidstone's margin to 34-22 but Havant refused to accept defeat and continued to move the ball wide at every occasion, to stretch Maidstone's defence. With Millar seeking sanctuary in his boot to keep the play in the Havant half, the last statement was made by the home side. A Havant line out in their own 22, was duly captured and delivered to the scrum half but a simple handling error in passing out gave Cowan the simple opportunity of picking up the ball and diving over for a try. With Millar delivering another conversion, the final score of 41-22 came to pass.



Craig Webb was awarded the man-of-the-match accolade for his try and assist but it was the attacking performance of the centres, particularly their ability to straighten the line, so obviously absent last week, that was the underpinning of Maidstone's performance. To counter this, the first-up tackling, particularly out wide, needs to improve if we are to

benefit from this improvement in the future.

Maidstone

Ben Williams; Josh Pankhurst; Joel Byford: Ben Massy; Adam Knight: Jake Johnson; Hugh Cowan; Charlie Williams: Ben Pitkin; Harry Millar: Lucian Morosan; Alfie Paea; Craig Webb; Tom Waring: Harry Millar

Replacements: Andi Petelo; Ian Lee; Alex Clark (All Used)

